

## Core Values of Foster Care Review\*

Foster care review is predicated on a number of core values, which relate to society's responsibility to children and the unique developmental needs of children. Children in care are the responsibility of the community and the larger society, as well as the responsibility of the foster care system. By intervening in family life through the legal system, and removing children from the physical care of their parents, the state and ultimately the citizenry assume a moral responsibility for the well-being of the children. If some harm has caused children to be separated from their families, the state should do no further harm. Furthermore, the state should intervene in the lives of families and children only when necessary, and only for as long as is necessary.

The periodic re-examination of the progress of children in out-of-home placement and their families to ensure safety, well-being and work toward the goal of permanency, is known as foster care review. This review process upholds the moral responsibility of the state and citizenry to ensure a safe passage to healthy adulthood for our children and to respect the importance of family, kin and culture. Whether the review is conducted by citizens, the judiciary, an administrative unit of the child-placing agency or a combination thereof the autonomy of the review process holds accountable those who are charged with the care and planning for the children. Review can improve the lives of children and their families and improve the services of the child welfare system.

A strong value of foster care review is that children need permanence within a family, and that their significant emotional attachments should be maintained. Children develop through a series of nurturing interactions with their parents, siblings, kinfolk, culture and environment. A child's identity or sense of selfhood grows from these relationships. Children grow and are best protected in the context of a family. If parents or kin are not able to provide care and protection for children, then children should be placed temporarily in a family setting which will maintain the child's significant emotional bonds and promote the child's cultural ties. The goal of foster care is permanence within a family.

Because of the rapidly unfolding nature of development and the brevity of their young lives, children have a different sense of time than adults. To a young child, a few months of separation can seem like an eternity. Needs that occur at a certain critical point in a child's development during that separation cannot be postponed, and often cannot be adequately addressed at a later time. Thus, there is a strong sense of urgency with which permanency issues must be addressed. Timeliness is essential. Foster care review keeps the developmental needs of children for timeliness of planning in the foreground.

\*

*From Individual Foster Care Case Review Guidelines, National Association of Foster Care Reviewers, 1997.*

Foster care review affirms the importance of the child's family and kin network to the child and to the planning process. Review offers the opportunity for the family to be heard through empowered participation. The process of review can be inclusive and should reflect the values of the worth and dignity of individuals and families; the belief that people can change when provided with the hope and supports, which meet their unique needs. The review process should acknowledge the strengths of families and show respect for the importance of their culture.

Foster care review must be integrated into other societal, organizational and community structures which address the needs of children and their families, and provide accountability for the ways in which services are delivered. Foster care review can be a form of quality assurance at many levels, providing information to help people change and help systems function more effectively.